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To The Grounds-Keeper In Elysium

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To The Grounds-Keeper In Elysium

by Ted Kooser

Do shadows cloak your dark disgrace,
custodian? Or do they bring
intensity to shroud your face,
unnoticed harbinger of Spring?

Do ancients smile as they defile
Elysium? Which spirit brings
his excrement and drifts awhile
nearby and mutters learned things?

Do you accept the offering?
And do you try some subtle feint
and hide to sniff it, wondering?
Does knowledge leave a mystic taint?

Does Socrates sleep in the park
with bright-eyed Plato taking notes,
as Charon plies his bloody bark
to dump his refuse where it floats
to shore and smells? Has Homer bent
an epithet to compensate,
like: "Neptune, golden-odored, lent
a perfumed aura, foul and great."

Does Leda feed the swans, and did
Cassandra learn to be content
with silence, as the chorus bid?
Was Agamemnon innocent?

Who carries water for the fires
the Phoenix starts? What ancient picks
the laurel sprigs and tunes the lyres?
Do dolphins navigate the Styx?

Do you excuse your blunders to
your ignorance, or do you trick
those raving occupants as you
stab doctrines with that pointed stick?